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The Rev. Jno. W. Nicholson, Sr., of Pungoteague, Virginia, writing me on 28 Sept. 1908, offers me the use of his "facsimile copy" of the Trial of Grace Sherwood." See his letter, enclosed herewith.
G. L. B.

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THE STORY OF GRACE SHERWOOD.

Our readers need not be told that in the English Colonies in North America the belief in witchcraft was general in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The statute books were filled with legislation on this subject, and the laws were very severe; they were also executed with the utmost rigor, though such was the injustice and cruelty resulting from their infliction that at last these laws became a dead letter.

In the County of Princess Anne, Virginia, occurred the famous prosecution of Grace Sherwood for witchcraft—or rather prosecutions; for the woman was subjected to several of them at intervals for the space of eight years. It is difficult to find out from the records annexed whether the prosecutors of Grace were instigated by an honest belief in her witchcraft, or whether they acted from some other motive. From a review of the case, we should judge that some of them actually believed Grace was a witch, while others made use of the laws against witchcraft to punish a disagreeable neighbor. There can be no doubt, from reading the following documents, that Grace was a nuisance in her parish; for such absurd charges would not have been listened to even in those days had they been made against a woman of unexceptionable deportment. Moreover, bad as may have been her conduct, there is pretty plain proof that the poor woman was to a certain extent persecuted by some of her neighbors.

The decision of the Court, however, shows that in the execution of the law they remembered mercy; for their charge to the officials shows that all the punishment they desired to be inflicted on Grace was a good ducking.

It is also very plain, from the records of the Court, composed of

some of the first gentlemen of the county, that they were not wholly exempt from the superstitions of the time; had they been, they would not have allowed the prosecution at all.

Another point is incidentally brought to light, and that is that Grace was strongly suspected of heathenism. This is conclusively proved by the order of the Court of 2d May, 1706, "that the Constable of that precinct go with the Sheriff and search the said Grace's house for *images and such like things.*"

It is generally believed that heathenism had been extinct in Europe for many centuries. This is not the fact; for it is certain that during the middle ages the adherents of the faith of our heathen forefathers were burnt by thousands as witches. Even at the present day this belief in Woden and Thor is not quite extinct, as is proved by the superstitions of the peasantry in the less civilized portions of Scotland, England, Scandinavia, and Germany. If such is the fact *now*, the faith of the Teutonic race must have been far more prevalent two hundred years ago, and it is highly probable that Grace Sherwood was an English peasant, who, like so many of her class, believed in the old Gods of our forefathers.

Grace Sherwood was well ducked, but not drowned. She *floated*, and was therefore certainly a witch. Nevertheless, according to the merciful order of the Court, she must have been taken out of the water and lodged in prison. How long she was kept in durance vile is not known; it is probable that she was let out after a while.

Whether Grace was a heathen or not, we have her Will among the records of Princess Anne County, of which document we append a certified copy. The language of the Will is perfectly orthodox; but as it was probably written by a lawyer who used the ordinary form, this does not necessarily prove what were the real opinions of Grace Sherwood. So that, after all, whether she was a heathen or not, must continue to be one of the unsolved questions of history. That she was a very "kantankarous" dame, seems proved not only by the prosecutions she underwent, but by the terms of her will; for she leaves all her property to her son John, and cuts off James and Richard with five shillings apiece.

Grace Sherwood lived not far from "Witchduck" farm, which is on a branch of the Lynnhaven River. The remains of her house can be seen in a few bricks still left of the chimney. The place where she was ducked is well known, and anyone in the neighborhood can point it out to visitors. The water is twelve feet deep not far from the shore, and therefore it was not necessary to take her out the usual length of a cabletow.

While the records of the Court are silent as to who took Grace out of the water, and as to how long she was kept in prison, we have plenty of traditions about her. These are no doubt as reliable as

most of those to which men appeal as authority. Some say she was drowned; some that she was not; some again that she is still alive at the bottom of Lynnhaven River. Some of the "oldest inhabitants" assert positively that Grace had a millstone tied to her neck; that she was sunk by the Sheriff in deep water; but that by the help of her friend, Old Nick, she was rescued from drowning. There is no doubt, they say, that some of the spectators, after she was sunk before their eyes, went up to Grace's cottage with the laudable curiosity of inspecting the premises of the witch. To their surprise and horror they found "Old Grace" sitting as usual in the chimney-corner smoking her pipe!

Others assert that ever since Grace was ducked, she has lived at the bottom of Lynnhaven River as lively as a perch. They declare that sometimes an English vessel runs up the stream to "Witchduck"—that precisely at low twelve the bark reaches the place where she was pitched overboard—that then "Old Grace" rises from the bottom, goes aboard, visits her native land, and is back again by cock-crow in her home among the oysters!

The following account is also entirely trustworthy: Several fishermen, who have tried their luck at the uncanny place, have felt a jerk at their lines; but when they have pulled up, instead of a bonito, to their horror they have seen "Old Grace's" wrinkled face rise to the surface. Letting go their tackle in fright, they have got away as quick as they could, not daring even to look back to see what became of the queer fish they had hooked!

We have told all we know of Grace Sherwood, her trials, and some of the traditions connected with her famous ducking. There are many others in the mouths of the people around "Witchduck," equally amusing and equally trustworthy.

Princess Anne, County Virginia:

In the Name of Almighty God. Amen: The last Will and Testament of Grace Sherwood. Imprimis, I give and bequeath unto my son, John Sherwood, my plantation whereon I now live containing one hundred and four acres of land to him and his heirs lawfully begotten forever to have and to hold forever; likewise I give unto my son, John Sherwood, at my decease, all my personal estate, moveable and unmoveable, what is in my house or what is without, everything whatsoever everything that is mine; I give and bequeath unto my son, John Sherwood, and to his heirs lawfully begotten, all wholy and solely at my decease excepting ten shillings to be given as follows: It: I give and bequeath unto my son, James Sherwood, five shillings current money of this Colony to be paid at my decease. It: I give and bequeath unto my son, Richard Sherwood, five shillings current

money of this Colony to be paid at my decease. After which payments, I leave my son, Jno. Sherwood, my whole and sole executor over this, my last Will and Testament, to see it faithfully performed; and to ye truth of this, my last Will and Testament, I have hereunto set my hand and seal, being in my perfect and sound mind and memory, this 20th day of August, in ye year of our Lord God 1733.

GRACE SHERWOOD [L. S].

The above Will was admitted to probat in the Court of Princess Anne County, on the 1st day of October, 1740.

PRINCESS ANN.

At a Court held the 10th of September, 1698.

Present:

Col. ANTHONY LAWSON,
Mr. BENONY BURROUGH,
Mr. EVAN JONES,
Capt. FRANCIS MORSE,
Mr. HENRY WOODHOUSE,
Mr. EDWARD MOSELEY,
Capt. WM. MOSELEY,
} *Justices.*

James Sherwood and Grace, his wife, suing John Gisburne and Jane, his wife, in an Action of Slander, setting forth by their petition that the defendants had wronged, defamed and abused the said Grace in her good name and reputation, saying that she is a Witch and bewitched their piggs to death and bewitched their cotten, &c., prays Judgment against the said Gisburne for £100 sterling damage with cost, to which the defendant pleadeth not guilty, the whole matter being put to a Jury who bring in their Verdict as followeth: Wee, of the Jury, find for the defendant. Francis Sayer, foreman, Christopher Cocke, Otho Russell, Mark Powell, Thomas Walke, George Warrington, Robert Renney, Robert Richmond, John Keeling, Thomas Hall, Henry Spratt, Adam Hayes. Upon the defendants' motion, it is ordered that the Juries Verdict be recorded, and Judgment is granted upon the same that the suit be dismist.

James Sherwood and Grace, his wife, suing Anthony Barnes and Elizabeth, his wife, in an Action of Slander, setting forth by their petition that the said Elizabeth had wronged and abused the said Grace in her good name and reputation, saying the said Grace came to her one night and rid her, and went out of the key-hole or crack of the door like a black catt, &c., prays judgment for £100 sterling

damage with cost, to which the defendant pleaded not guilty, the whole matter being put to a Jury who bring in their Verdict as followeth: Wee, of the Jury, find for the defendant. Francis Sayer, foreman, Christopher Cocke, Otho Russell, Mark Powell, Thomas Walke, George Warrington, Robert Renney, Robert Richmond, John Keeling, Thomas Hall, Henry Spratt, Adam Hayes. Upon the defendants' motion, it is ordered that the Juries Verdict be recorded, and Judgment is granted upon the same that the suit be dismist.

PRINCESS ANN.

At a Court held the 7th October, 1705.

Present:

Mr. BENONY BURROUGH,
Col. EDW. MOSELEY,
Mr. JNO. CORNICK,
Capt. HENRY CHAPMAN,
Mr. JNO. RICHASON,
Capt. GEO. HANDCOCK,
Col. THORROWGOOD came late.
} *Justices.*

Grace Sherwood, suing Luke Hill and uxor, in an Action of Trespass of Assault and Battery, setting forth how ye defendant's wife had assaulted, bruised, maimed and barbarously beaten ye plaintiff to her great damage, fifty pounds sterling damage, to which ye defendants, by Richard Corbett, their attorney, pleaded not guilty, and of this put themselves on ye country with ye plaintiff in like manner. Whereupon a jury was impannelled and sworn to try ye case, who bring in their Verdict. Wee, of ye Jury, doe in a diff. depending between Grace Sherwood, plaintiff, and Luke Hill and Elizabeth, his wife, defendants, find for ye plaintiff twenty shillings sterling damages with cost. Mark Powell, foreman, &c. On ye plaintiff's motion the Jury's Verdict is ordered to be recorded, and accordingly ordered that ye defendant pay to ye plaintiff twenty shillings sterling damages with costs, also expense.

PRINCESS ANN.

At a Court held ye 6th February, 1706.

Present:

Col. MOSELEY,
Col. ADAM THORROWGOOD,
Capt. CHAPMAN,
Capt. HANDCOCK,
Mr. JNO. CORNICK,
Mr. RICHASON came late.
} *Justices.*

Suite for suspicion of witchcraft, brought by Luke Hill against Grace Sherwood, is ordered to be referred till to-morrow.

PRINCESS ANN.

At a Court held ye 7th February, 1706.

Present:

Col. MOSELEY,
Col. THORROWGOOD,
Mr. JNO. RICHASON,
Mr. JNO. CORNICK,
Capt. CHAPMAN,
Capt. HANDCOCK,
} *Justices.*

Whereas, A complaint was brought against Grace Sherwood on suspicion of witchcraft by Luke Hill, &c., and ye matter being after a long time debated, ordered that ye said Hill pay all fees of this complaint, and that ye said Grace be here next Court to be searched according to ye complaint by a jury of women, to decide ye said difference, and ye Sheriff is likewise ordered to summon an able jury accordingly.

PRINCESS ANN.

At a Court held ye 7th March, 1706.

Present :

Col. Edward Moseley,
Col. Adam Thorrowgood,
Mr. Jno. Cornick,
Capt. Henry Chapman,
Mr. Wm. Smith,
Mr. Jno. Richason,
Capt. Geo. Handcock.
} *Justices.*

Whereas, A complaint has been to this Court brought by Luke Hill and his wife that one Grace Sherwood, of ye County, was and have been a long time suspected of witchcraft, and have been as such reported; wherefore ye Sheriff at ye last Court was ordered to summon a jury of women to ye Court to search her on ye said suspicion, she assenting to ye same, and after ye jury was impanelled and sworn and sent out to make due inquiry and inspection into all circumstances ; after a mature consideration they bring in ye verdict: "We of ye jury have searched Grace Sherwood, and have found two things like titts, with several other spots." Elizabeth Barnes, foreman; Sarah Norris, Margaret Watkins, Hannah Dinis, Sarah Goodard, Mary Burgess, Sarah Sergeant, Winifred Davis, Ursula Henley, Ann Bridges, Ezable Waples, Mary Cotle.

PRINCESS ANN.

At a Court held ye 2nd May, 1706.

Present :

Mr. Jno. Richason,
Maj. Henry Spratt,
Mr. Jno. Cornick,
Capt. Henry Chapman,
Mr. Wm. Smyth.
} *Justices.*

Whereas, A former complaint was brought against Grace Sherwood for suspicion of witchcraft, which by ye Attorney-General report to his Excellency in Councill was too generall, and not charging her with any particular act; therefore re-presented to them, ye Princess

Ann Court might, if they thought fit have her examined *Denovo*, and ye Court being of opinion that there is great cause of suspicion, doe therefore order that ye Sheriff take ye said Grace into his safe custody untill she shall give bond and security for her appearance to ye next Court, to be examined *Denova*, and that ye Constable of that precinkt goe with ye Sheriff and search ye said Grace's house and all suspicious places carefully, for all images and such like things as may anyway through the suspicion; and it is likewise ordered that ye Sheriff summon an able jury of women, also all evidences as can give in anything against her in evidence in behalf of our Sovereign Lady ye Queen, to attend ye next Court accordingly.

PRINCESS ANN.

At a Court held ye 6th June, 1706.

Present :

Mr. Jno. Richason,
Capt. Horatio Woodhouse,
Mr. Jno. Cornick,
Capt. Henry Chapman,
Capt. Wm. Smyth,
Capt. Geo. Handcock.
} *Justices.*

Whereas, Grace Sherwood of ye County have been complained of as a person suspected of witchcraft, and now being brought before this Court in order for examination ye Court have therefore requested Mr. Maxma. Boush to present information against her as Councill in behalf of our Sovereign Lady ye Queen, in order to her being brought to a regular trial.

Whereas, An information in behalf of her Majesty was presented by Luke Hill to ye Court, in pursuance to Mr. General Attorney Tomson report on his Excellency ordered in Council ye 16th Aprill last, about Grace Sherwood being suspected of witchcraft, haye thereupon sworn severall evidences against her, by which it doth very likely appear.

PRINCESS ANN.

At a Court held the 7th of June, 1706.

Present:

Mr. Jno. Richason,
Maj. Henry Spratt,
Mr. Jno. Cornick,
Capt. Chapman,
Capt. Wm. Smyth,
Capt. Geo. Handcock,
} *Justices.*

Whereas, At ye last Court an order was past that ye Sheriff should summons an able Jury of women to serch Grace Sherwood on suspicion of witchcraft, which, although ye same was performed by ye Sheriff, yet they refused and did not appear, it is therefore ordered that ye same persons be again summoned by ye Sheriff for their contempt, to be dealt with according to ye utmost severity of ye law, and that a new Jury of women be by him summoned to appear next Court to serch her on ye aforesaid suspicion, and that he likewise summon all evidences that he shall be informed of as materiall in ye complaint, and that she continue in ye Sheriff's custody unless she give good bond and security for her appearance at ye next Court, and that she be of good behavior towards her Majestie and all her Leidge people in ye mean time.

PRINCESS ANN.

At a Court held ye 5th July, Anno Dom. 1706.

Present:

Mr. Jno. Richason,
Capt. Jno. Moseley,
Capt. Henry Chapman,
Capt. Wm. Smyth.
} *Justices.*

Whereas, For this severall courts business between Luke Hill and Grace Sherwood on suspicion of witchcraft have been for severall things omitted, particularly for want of a Jury to serch her, and ye Court being doubtful that they should not get one, ye Court being willing to have all means possible tryed either to acquit her or to give more strength to ye suspicion that she might be dealt with as

deserved, therefore it was ordered that ye day by her own consent to be tryed in ye water by ducking; but ye weather being very rainy and bad, soe that possibly it might endanger her health, it is therefore ordered that ye Sheriff request ye Justices personally to appear on Wednesday next by ten of ye clock at ye court-house, and that he secure ye body of ye said Grace till ye time to be forthcoming, and to be dealt with as aforesaid.

PRINCESS ANN.

At a Court held ye 10th July, 1706.

Present:

Col. MOSELEY,
Capt. MOSELEY,
Capt. WOODHOUSE,
Mr. JNO. CORNICK,
Capt. CHAPMAN,
Capt. WM. SMYTH,
Mr. RICHASON, came late.
} *Justices.*

Whereas, Grace Sherwood being suspected of witchcraft, have a long time waited for a fitt opportunity for a further examination, and by her consent and approbation of ye Court it is ordered that ye Sheriff take all such convenient assistance of boats and men as shall be by him thought fitt to meet at Jno. Harper's plantacion, in order to take ye said Grace forthwith and put her into above man's debth, and try her how she swims therein, always having care of her life to preserve her from drowning, and as soon as she comes out that he request as many ansient and knowing women as possible he cann to serch her carefully for all teats, spotts, and marks about her body not usuall on others, and that as they find ye same to make report on oath to ye truth thereof to ye Court; and further it is ordered that some women be requested to shift and search her before she goes into ye water, that she carry nothing about her to cause any further suspicion.

Whereas, On complaint of Luke Hill, in behalf of her Majesty, that now is against Grace Sherwood for a person suspected of witchcraft, and having had sundry evidences sworne against her, proving many complaints, to which she could not make any excuse, or little or nothing to say in her own behalf, only seemed to rely on what ye Court should doe, and thereupon consented to be tryed in ye water,

and likewise to be serched again. Both experiments being tryed, and she swiming when therein, and found contrary to custom, and ye judgment of all ye spectators, and afterwards being serched by five antient women, who have all declared on oath that she is not like them nor noe other woman that they knew of, having two things like titts on her private parts of a black coller, being blacker than ye rest of her body; all which circumstances ye Court weighing in their consideration, do therefore order that ye Sheriff take ye said Grace into his custody, and to commit her body to ye Common Goal of this County, there to secure her by irons or otherwise, there to remain till such time as he shall be otherwise directed, in order for her coming to ye Common Goal of ye County, to be brought to a future tryall there.